

Do Universities Prepare Student Teachers Adequately for Teaching Practice?

Tabitha Grace Mukeredzi*, Cephass Makwara

Durban University of Technology - Indumiso Campus, Imabali, South Africa

*tabitham@dut.ac.za**

ABSTRACT

Pre-service teacher practicum is generally conceived of as a rite of passage into the teaching profession as it socialises and exposes trainees to their eventual workplace, the classroom and school environment to contextualise theoretical knowledge gained in university. The process also offers student teacher exposure to teaching real learners in real classrooms. Given these central roles of teaching practice, this paper explores the extent to which Bachelor of Education pre-service teachers from one South African university are adequately prepared for teaching practice. Qualitative data generated from 20 student teachers through a questionnaire with open ended questions, complemented by focus group discussions were analysed through open coding. Data from both questionnaires and focus group discussions suggests that student teachers were adequately prepared in content, pedagogical aspects like lesson preparation, questioning techniques, learner assessment and professionalism. It also emerged that pre-service teachers were not prepared adequately for classroom management, learner discipline, and teaching practical lessons. It also emerged that student teachers were not exposed to peer and micro-teaching. Student teacher preparation for teaching practice should include teaching practical aspects of their subjects, classroom management and exposure to peer and micro teaching as this is the starting point for building education as a profession with real opportunities for growth that sustain a teacher's craft over their career, not just a couple of years.

Keywords: *adequate preparation, teaching practice, student teachers, Bachelor of Education, South Africa*

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INTRODUCTION

Teaching practice (TP) is an indispensable component of any initial teacher education programme which empowers future teachers with knowledge, skills and abilities towards a lifelong career in the profession (Iwu 2021). Teachers contribute immensely to national growth as they produce future leaders. As such, a competent teaching workforce is invaluable to improve pass rates and reduce learner dropout. TP has also been described as the most important component of an effective teacher preparation programme (Conderman, et al., 2014). It offers student teachers (herein called students) an opportunity to transition from student role to that of a teacher through active engagement and inquiry within authentic teaching and learning environments (Conderman et al., 2014). The process socialises pre-service teachers into the profession through development of improved collaboration and communication including supportive relationships with schools, learners, mentor teachers, university lecturers and parents (McLeod, 2020). Consequently, student practicum is regarded as a time-honoured and highly valued teacher education tradition conceived of as a 'rite of passage' into the teaching profession given that it initiates and exposes trainees to their eventual workplace – the classroom and school (Grisham, Ferguson & Brink, 2004). Students have the opportunity to contextualise theoretical knowledge gained in university by practicing techniques of teaching in preparation for the real world of teaching (du Plessis, 2013).

The students themselves appreciate TP, viewing it as the most significant component of their preparation for becoming teachers since they gain skills of teaching from teaching real learners in real classrooms (Brooke, 2016; Mannathoko, 2013). TP has distinct value in forming trainee roles and perceptions of their responsibilities as future teachers. Hence, the concept of TP represents a variety of experiences to which students are exposed when they work in classrooms and schools (du Plessis, 2013). These experiences are influenced by many factors which trainees may not anticipate. Mannathoko (2013) points out that notwithstanding its value, TP, is often complex, and demoralizing when students are not adequately prepared for the process. Such experiences may influence their views and attitudes to the profession broadly, but specifically to subjects they are trained to teach.

Marais and Meier (2008) add that students are often anxious about managing classroom discipline and controlling learners, relationships with mentors, curriculum content knowledge and understanding learners that they teach. These complexities may cause significant anxiety and stress if students are not adequately prepared. Odundo, Ganira, and Ngaruiya (2018) add that adequate preparation for TP involves equipping students with knowledge of all aspects of teacher practice from preparation, resources, delivery, management, assessment, co-curricular and others to enable adjustment to varying situational demands of learning and other school activities. With adequate preparation for TP, students facilitate learning processes and guide learners discerning appropriate application of knowledge, skills and attitudes for their professional competency. This study therefore sought to understand whether one university in KwaZulu-Natal province adequately prepared Bachelor of Education (B.Ed) students for TP. The study addressed one question: 'Do B.Ed students feel that they are adequately prepared for TP when they go to schools?

Findings will hopefully offer teacher educators insights to conceptualise TP through students' eyes, and help them evaluate their training programmes. It is argued that an important factor inhibiting complete transfer of theories taught in university to classroom practice, lies in the failure of respective teacher training programmes to act upon and challenge students' already formed beliefs.

The B.Ed. Programme

The B.Ed. programme offered at this one university was a four-year full-time study at Further Education and Training (FET) Level in three specialisations: Economic Management (EMS 80246) Natural Science (NS 80247) and Technology (TECH 80248). The curriculum was made up of core education

modules, teaching specialisation modules and TP. Core education modules introduced students to knowledge around curriculum and assessment, theories of learning, classroom management, barriers to learning, language across the curriculum and varied teaching strategies. The specialisation modules focussed on particular school subjects or learning areas that students were enrolled for. and how to teach them.

TP component, referred to as WIL formed a major component of the B.Ed course spread across the four years of the programme as follows:

1. Work Integrated Learning (WIL) (EXBE 101) Year 1
4 weeks: Academic Literacy, Peer and Micro Teaching.
2. Work Integrated Learning (WIL) (EXBE 201) Year 2
4 weeks: Guided Observation
3. Work Integrated Learning (WIL) (EXBE 301) Year 3
4 weeks: Guided Observation and Collaborative Teaching
4. Work Integrated Learning (WIL) (EXBE 401) Year 4
6 months, Full Time Teaching (School of Education Handbook 2016)

From the School handbook, students spent 4 weeks on attachment in the second and third year of study and six months in the fourth year. In the first-year, students engaged in academic literacy and peer and microteaching at the university. In the second and third-year students undertook guided observation and in third year this was complemented by co-teaching teaching with mentors. The guided observations enabled students to observe mentor lesson preparation, methods and strategies, language used, how they scaffold learner understanding, interests, motivations and learning styles. This would help students better prepare for their own lessons. Aglazor (2017) points out that when students observe mentors and learners in action, it is not a mechanical application of methods and techniques, but a reflection of how mentors interpreted these processes. During co-teaching, students had opportunities to glean new insights into effective classroom practice making them aware of what mentors consider important in lesson preparation and delivery (Mukeredzi, 2017). Students would teach sections or whole lessons while mentors observed.

In their fourth year, students assumed full-time teaching for six months guided and supported by school-based mentors. This study therefore sought to understand the degree of preparedness of these future teachers for TP.

Literature Review

Tshuma and Bhebhe (2016) indicate that initial training of pre-service teachers starts in teacher education institutions, and students should be adequately prepared and equipped with all relevant teaching and learning skills required for practice in schools. The institution should therefore lay adequate foundation for requisite knowledge and skills for the professional development of students before they go for TP.

Poulou (2007) who studied students' concerns on TP discovered three challenges that trouble them related to:

- Limited subject matter knowledge for teaching, and putting it across for learner comprehension, which constitutes criterion measurement for assessing effectiveness of their teaching.
- Classroom management, handling learners with learning or behavioural problems.
- Lack of essential teacher attributes, competencies and skills needed for classroom management.

Students' challenges with classroom management is confirmed by Tshuma and Bhebhe (2016) who indicate that learner behaviour management is the biggest concern of students on TP. Beck and Kosnik

(2002) lament that students are left in the dark about the reality awaiting them regarding learner discipline and classroom management when they report for TP in schools and are at a loss where to begin. To add, Marais and Meier (2004) say negative student experiences on TP include lack of knowledge of handling discipline in classrooms thus impeding smooth and effective lesson presentation. Inadequate student preparation for classroom management relates to what Odundo, Ganira, and Ngaruiya (2018) define as trainees lack proficiency in preparation and management of classroom practice. When students are adequately equipped for TP, they develop confidence from content and pedagogical mastery, and use a variety of resources for successful instructional pathways.

On the contrary, Kiggundu and Nayimuli (2009) found that students need adequate preparation to translate theory into practice in the classroom. Indeed, Du Plessis, Marais, Van Schalkwyk and Weeks (2011) also report that students on practicum get confused about a discrepancy between theory of education and reality of instruction in the classroom, and that they cannot reconcile teaching methods explained during university lectures with those used in schools. Du Plessis et al (2011) further explain that students are confused and lack insight into the relationship between university theory and teaching practice they encounter in schools. Some students are also often disillusioned by heavy workloads that they are expected to carry after hours: marking, and lesson preparation. From other studies, du Plessis (2017) and Gravett and Jiyane (2019) reveal that students complain about lack of preparation for the reality of TP, highlighting lack of understanding of knowledge on the nature of children, nature of teaching, nature of school routines, teaching strategies, assessment, learner motivation, classroom layout and staff meetings. In the absence of knowledge of these important pedagogical aspects, teaching, learners, and students suffer. Understanding the nature of the children, nature of teaching etc. enables one to reflect on what they already know and what they are learning which enhances modification of their attitudes and delivery of content.

Concomitantly, Ngcobo (1989) laments an obvious lack of liaison between universities and schools which creates a theory/practice dichotomy. This is a momentous problem confronting students during TP. However, Robinson (2001) reports that schools complain that institutions do not prepare them for partnerships around student TP in schools, consequently students and staff encounter numerous negative experiences. These weak linkages between schools and institutions contribute to shortcomings in education as many teacher education programmes do not address contexts in which students or teachers operate. Teacher education institutions should focus on close collaboration between them and TP sites. Ideally, over the period of TP, a student should have experienced all typical schools and teaching processes one is likely to encounter as a teacher.

Theoretical Framework

Our approach draws on the socio-constructivist theory of learning advanced by Piaget (1896-1980) and Vygotsky (1896-1834) which views knowledge construction as occurring in social contexts, because learning activities are socially and contextually bound (Mukeredzi & Mandrona, 2013). The school community is the context, inclusive of all cultural and contextual norms and practices. Thus, students learn to teach through engagement in socially and contextually determined activities. Constructivist perspective emphasizes the active role played by students in knowledge construction as meaning-making is by negotiated consensus as opposed to transmission with minimal intellectual participation (du Plessis, et al. 2011). Emphasis is on meaning-making in interaction with peers and the context. In this regard Mukeredzi and Mandrona (2013) explain that such learning neither takes place situated only in a person's head nor is it a passive development of behaviours, rather, learning is influenced by external/contextual forces and occurs in collaborative engagement in activity. As the contexts are central to student's learning (Kim, 2001), its design should enhance and challenge their thinking. The intention is to support students

in becoming effective professionals who can handle real-world teaching complexities (Mukeredzi & Samuel, 2021).

Socio-constructivism is conducive to student-centred teaching and learning as it foregrounds the student's own efforts to comprehend. As learning is an active meaning-making process of transforming understandings in interaction, the student assumes an active, central role in their learning (Kim, 2001; Mukeredzi & Mandrona, 2013). Learning-by-doing is fore-grounded to enable the students to experience relevant and effective activities. Active involvement in classroom practices would provide such experiences. Proponents of constructivism believe that instead of presenting students with simplified (schematic) problems and basic skill drills, they should be allowed to handle real-life situations typified in their activities (Mukeredzi & Mandrona, 2013). Students should construct knowledge and develop teaching skills through engagement in teaching activities.

In addition, social constructivist learning does not focus on individual but collaborative learning. Collaborative learning activities shape individual learners and can inculcate new strategies and knowledge (Du Plessis et al. 2011). Social constructivists regard learning as a way of broadening group abilities through participation with others in activities experienced as meaningful. Mukeredzi and Mandrona (2013) indicate that critical in student interaction is involvement of 'knowledgeable others' to gain social meanings and values of important systems. In this study, 'knowledgeable others' include mentors, peers, university staff, other teachers and learners who facilitate and support students in their knowledge construction.

Marais and Meier (2008) add that collaboration during TP aims to develop student abilities to establish and defend their independently reasoned stance on any matter while respecting positions of others on similar matters and working together to negotiate or construct meaning by consensus. Thus, to accomplish this change, students must talk and listen to others (mentors, learners, university lecturers and school community members) as they interpret policies and curricular in social situations. In these processes, students use prior knowledge and what the contexts provides during social interaction to construct meaning and understanding and to act (Du Plessis et al. 2011).

However, this does not mean that mentors have no outcomes planned for students. They have overarching goals that guide planning, but students' ideas and experiences in relation to key topics such as lesson plans, teaching media and assessment criteria are elicited, and learning situations are fashioned to help students to elaborate or restructure their pre-existing knowledge, thereby professionally learning.

This study sought to understand how the students conceived their preparation for TP to gain those experiences during TP and the meanings that they attached to such experiences.

METHODOLOGY

The study sought to understand student teachers' preparedness for TP by the university. To gain an understanding of the extent to which the university prepares students for TP from students' perspectives, qualitative research approach was employed. Couched in the interpretivist paradigm, 20 BED students' views were sought through a questionnaire with open-ended questions complemented by focus group discussions.

The 20 participants were conveniently sampled as they were accessible and willing to participate. They were all in the cohort allocated to the co-author of this paper for TP supervision.

Data generation was conducted between June and September 2019. The process commenced with a questionnaire administered to all 20 students while on TP and send back when completed through WhatsApp. These students were in third and fourth year of study because these are students who engaged in actual teaching. Of the 20 participants, 14 students returned the completed questionnaire. Students consented to participation through a consent form. While these were students known to the co-author,

he emphasized to them that their involvement in the study had nothing to do with their assessment all what was needed was their true and honest answers.

Following questionnaire administration, all participants were engaged in three focus group discussions (FGDs) upon return to university. Eight of the 20 participants, were in third year of study, while 12 were doing fourth year. There were 9 male students and 11 females (See Table 1).

Table 1 Biographical details of participants

Students	Year Group		Gender	
	Third	Fourth	Male	Female
1	✓		✓	
2	✓			✓
3	✓			✓
4	✓		✓	
5	✓			✓
6	✓			✓
7		✓	✓	
8	✓		✓	
9		✓		✓
10		✓		✓
11		✓	✓	
12		✓		✓
13		✓	✓	
14		✓		✓
15	✓		✓	
16	✓		✓	
17		✓	✓	
18		✓		✓
19		✓		✓
20	✓			✓
Total	10	10	9	11

The FGDs had between four and six participants and were held at the university after TP. The number of students in the groups was determined by their lecture timetables consequently, discussions were not by year group. The same questions as on the questionnaire were asked. The two researchers facilitated FGDs which lasted approximately one and half hours and all were audio recorded.

The generated data were transcribed verbatim and analyzed through open coding. Data from the two sources were pooled together as responses were similar. After reading and re-reading the transcripts and listening to audios many times, transcripts were scrutinized writing words or phrases in the margins after finding interesting or relevant information. This was followed by going through notes in margins and listing them. There followed reading through lists and categorizing each item using description of what it was about. These categories were then clustered into categories of relevant meaning, relevant to research questions. Following this, categories were further grouped into themes based on similarity of perspectives. The main author analyzed data after which the co-author examined the data set to identify any errors/omissions, re-examining data against codes, categories, and themes to further verify and confirm them to ensure that themes adequately represented the data. Asking the co-author to check data set was vital for enhancing trustworthiness. To make data visible we selected quotes from students' responses that represented different themes, ensuring appropriate representation across data sources and years of study. Mukeredzi (2015, p. 6) cites Singleton and Straits (1999) who defines this as "... capturing in their language and letting them speak for themselves."

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Table 2 Participants responses (3rd year students, 1 – 8, 4th year 9-20)

Students	Adequate Preparation						Inadequate Preparation				
	Content	Planning	Delivery	Motivation	Diversity	Professionalism	Class management	Learner discipline	Practical	Content Mismatch	Peer Teaching
1	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓
2		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	
3	✓				✓		✓	✓	✓		✓
4		✓	✓	✓			✓	✓		✓	✓
5	✓	✓			✓	✓	✓	✓			
6	✓		✓	✓			✓	✓	✓	✓	
7	✓	✓	✓	✓			✓	✓	✓		✓
8		✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	
9	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓			✓
10	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓
11	✓	✓	✓				✓	✓			✓
12	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	
13	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓
14	✓	✓	✓	✓			✓	✓	✓		
15	✓				✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓
16	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓		✓		
17	✓	✓	✓	✓			✓			✓	
18	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓		✓			
19	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓			✓
20		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓			✓	✓
Total	16	20	18	12	14	12	18	16	7	10	11

Areas of Adequate Preparation around Classroom Practice

Participants reported that the course had prepared them for TP generally well. Findings among others revealed adequate preparation in content, lesson planning and delivery while class management, including learner discipline lacked preparation. Some made interesting statements regarding the link between theory acquired at university and skills that they were expected to apply during TP. This contradicted observations by Du Plessis et al (2011) discussed above who noted discrepancy between theory learnt in university and classroom realities. Most respondents hailed TP for being interesting because they could apply most of the content that they had studied, and enjoyed teaching because of this conversance with subject content. Student teachers emphasized that they had received adequate preparation on content of their subjects including related pedagogical aspects and professionalism.

A 3rd year, ST1 on the questionnaire explained:

I feel I was well prepared in content of each subject, including lesson planning, questioning techniques and learner assessment.

Another 3rd year, ST4 during FGD said:

We went through the teaching practice manual, lecturers explained how to prepare a

lesson and a TP file, how to conduct a lesson.

4th year ST7 during FGD also added:

We were taught how to prepare, plan and deliver those lessons. They said before you go to class you should go through your lesson. If you have planned, you know the lesson will go well.

Cogill (2008) suggests that content knowledge (CK) is a significant aspect of classroom practice since it affects planning, task setting, questioning, explaining, giving feedback, and assessment. In other words, in the absence of content there is no teaching and there is no learning, because teachers cannot teach what they do not know. CK is the knowledge that teachers should teach, which learners must learn.

Other students raised adequate preparation around classroom communication, learner motivation and capturing learner attention. One student on the questionnaire wrote:

They taught us classroom communication, learner motivation, grabbing attention and maintaining it throughout the lesson. ... making them work in groups, so that they learn from one another. (4th year ST 11).

The comments above, are in line with learning through social interaction for meaning-making, as emphasized by the socio-constructivist theory (Marais & Meier, 2011). Making learners work in groups from socio-constructivist theory enables learning from 'knowledgeable others' to gain and construct own knowledge. Knowledgeable others in this case were the peers. The finding however contradicts findings by Kiggundu and Naimuli (2007) who reveal that students often have problems of communication with learners. The researchers found that learners could not communicate in English while students could not communicate in the learners' mother tongue. Participants in the current study were able to communicate with their learners.

Many students acknowledged adequate preparation around motivation. They hailed the value of motivation: positive and negative reinforcement, creating a conducive learning environment, which concepts they covered in psychology modules Education 201 and Education 401. ST10 a 4th year student during FGD pointed out: "I discovered that learners become enthusiastic and actively participate when they are praised and rewarded for their efforts." Most participants reported that they also drew on knowledge and techniques gained during specific subject didactics and professional studies lectures including what they acquired in previous TP stages to structure and present, their lessons. Gravett and Jiyane (2019) however indicate that students are often not well prepared for various teaching aspects like motivation, and pedagogy, which was not the case in the current study.

In this study, unlike in a Kenya study by Odundo, Ganira, and Ngaruiya (2018) where they found that students got to their TP schools without knowledge of writing on the chalkboard, our participants were prepared for chalkboard work. A 4th year ST13 on the questionnaire wrote: "we were taught how to write on the chalkboard in a way that learners can read from all points in the classroom." Chalkboard work, also known as Blackboard work is a class management system through which teachers provide content to learners in a central location. It forms a powerful visual tool that facilitates effective instruction in the classroom and its proper use not only provides learners with a holistic understanding of a lesson through visual representation, but also aids teachers in retaining attention in the classroom (ibid). Students also highlighted adequate preparation in handling diversity in the classroom and use of learner-centred pedagogies. ST3 3rd year on the questionnaire explained

They taught us inclusive education. They said we should give attention to all learners and ensure that they participate in all activities. So, I went to TP knowing exactly how to deal with different learners and classroom diversity.

Another during FGD said:

I was well prepared for inclusive teaching/learning, barriers to learning, and learner-centred teaching which we learnt in Education 201. (4th year ST9).

Having a diverse group of learners simply means recognising that people are unique in their own way. A look into our classrooms today shows that learners are from different socio-economic, language, cultural, religious, ethnic, racial, gender, sexual orientation, ability groups etc. and all come to school with different experiences. The South Africa Department of Education (DBE) (2011) advises that educators and learners should value, embrace, and make positive use of those differences and teachers have an important responsibility of making sure that all learners from whatever background feel included and affirmed in the classroom. As such, teachers should bracket or monitor their own beliefs, attitudes and behaviours when responding to diverse learners in classrooms. Learner-centred pedagogy and inclusivity are consistent with socio-constructivist theory which emphasises that learners should assume a central role in their learning and that this knowledge construction occurs in social contexts, as learning activities are socially and contextually bound (Kim, 2001; Mukeredzi & Mandrona, 2013).

Adequate preparation related to professionalism

Student teachers also made reference to having been prepared adequately around professionalism. One student on the questionnaire wrote:

We were taught how to conduct ourselves as professionals, how to be a teacher, the way you dress, the way you speak etc, like a teacher does. (3rd year ST5).

They said we should be obedient, respect other teachers as colleagues, and respect learners. We should learn from them all without acting all supreme or with pride. (4th year ST 11in the FGD).

They always talked about the importance of being well behaved, respectful as teachers without involvement in some nonsense but being prepared to listen and learn. (4th year ST13 in the FGD).

Drawing on the socio constructivist theory, TP is intended to develop student teaching abilities, through talking, listening and learning from others and from cultural and contextual norms and practices, within the context (Marais & Meier, 2008). Mukeredzi and Sibanda (2016) indicate that professionalism includes collegial collaboration and respect, which help work effectively with both colleagues and learners, building and maintaining evolving forms of mutual engagement; being friendly and open in collegial interactions including appropriate interactions with learners avoiding being too familiar. A culture of respect in workplaces encourages innovation, sharing of ideas, staff wellbeing, satisfaction, performance, and productivity. When teachers know they are valued by their colleagues, they become less stressed and more committed to their work.

While students had many areas where they reported having received adequate preparation for TP, they also indicated areas where preparation for TP was inadequate.

Areas of inadequate preparation

Classroom management emerged as one major area in which student teachers were not prepared for TP. Some of the comments made were:

We were not taught classroom management skills. Problem solving skills may come naturally but we should have been taught how to react and solve certain problems appropriately because some are short tempered and they would make irrational decisions because of anger. (4th year ST14 on the questionnaire).

They did not tell us how to discipline children. I did not know what to do with them, so I relied on my mentor every time which is bad because learners will not respect you but the mentor. (3rd year ST8 in FGD).

We were not prepared for disciplining learners because corporal punishment is not allowed. These learners make so much noise. I did not know what to do, I just sent them out of class. (3rd year ST1 in FGD).

They did not tell us how to control screaming children. They don't do homework, don't participate in class. I had no idea what to do, it was just wasting time for teaching/learning. I never felt safe inside school premises because of learner behaviour, fighting, being rude and disrespectful. (4th year ST12 in FGD).

Even assessment was difficult. Learners kept talking, laughing, walking around aimlessly, and making noises, even after being warned that such behaviour was not tolerated. (3rd year ST2 on the Questionnaire).

All participants agreed that classroom discipline was a concern. They explained that they could not control the learners who disrupted classroom activities. Most participants reported that, despite thorough lesson preparation, they found that it was not easy to teach because learners were not disciplined, did not do assignments, made a lot noise and were not actively involved in classroom activities. The comments raised above relate to findings by Kiggundu and Nayimuli (2007) who report deteriorated moral values in schools and a neglect of discipline. In-school violence was apparently a common reality. ST12 above referred feelings of insecurity in the school, and the school as a place where learners fought, were rude and had no respect for teachers.

Given that classroom control and learner discipline are primarily concerned with building an environment that optimises teacher professional development, it should not be viewed as peripheral but integral to teaching practice. Cohen, Manion and Morrisson (1997) indicate that discipline constitutes a 'built in' element of classroom practice, not a 'bolt on' extra. Through learning in the formal domain, the students were supposed to have developed an understanding of alternative ways of handling misbehaviour other than corporal punishment and exclusion. This would illustrate a shift from learner discipline to learner management, which stresses nurturing acceptable behaviour and improved achievement through active engagement and participation in learning activities. Scholars (see for example Moletsane, 2012) suggest that such facilitation involves less emphasis on criticism and punishment, but more on learner understanding, praise and reward.

However, from the perspective of these students, learner discipline remained an emotive and controversial issue. The situation of learner indiscipline in South African Schools is getting worse and even out of hand, including bullying behaviour (du Plessis, 2017) and seems to have undermined teacher authority and academic achievement (Shaikhmag & Naidoo, 2021). A lack of learner discipline may

seriously hamper teaching and learning processes, and, if disruptive behaviour prevails, education cannot be successful.

Others lamented the absence of peer teaching or micro-teaching:

They should have given us practice through peer or micro-teaching to help us deal with learner mis-behaviour. This would have given us confidence. I was scared to stand in front of the class some were big and, in 2nd year I did not teach. (3rd year ST8 during FGD).

Other universities for example ... make students teach their peers before they go on TP so that they practice and learn. They did not make us do that. (ST3 3rd year in FGD).

While the School Handbook reflects micro and peer teaching in Year One, apparently this was not put into practice for these year-groups. Peer and micro-teaching raised by ST8 and ST3 are usually followed by whole group critiquing and discussion. Peer teaching is a kind of preparation which Jackson and Bruegmann (2009:1) argue: “through this teaching activity, students experience learning by observing their peers.” Tshuma and Bhebhe (2016) view peer teaching as an activity where a student presents a lesson to or teaches other students a lesson they would have selected. This is one effective way to enhance students’ preparation for TP. Micro teaching involves students going to schools to practice teaching with real pupils for a day or two per week then bring their experience to university where post-micro-teaching discussions are held to prepare students for TP. Altuk, Kaya, and Bahceci (2012) suggest that micro-teaching prepares students for TP assisting them to gain confidence, and learn teaching and learning skills. Such activities are also intended to provide students with exposure to what to look out for during lesson observations.

While students reported that they were adequately prepared for content knowledge, however, there were some mismatches between some curriculum content aspects that students were taught in university and those taught in schools. This comment exemplifies:

They did not check changes that were made to school curriculum, so topics that they taught us were different from those required for teaching in schools. We had to study on our own and rely on mentors. This made mentors not to trust us with their learners. (3rd year ST5 in FGD).

They don’t communicate with schools. The content that we were given to teach is different from what we learnt at university. We were shocked to get documents with different material. (3rd year ST3 in FGD)

Mentors studied by Kiggundu and Nayimuli (2007) revealed that some students come for TP without any curriculum knowledge. “They don’t know where to start. They come for TP very raw, and you work so hard to teach them.” This appears to have been the case with some students in our study who were confronted with topics that they had not been taught. Students detected a missing link between practicing schools and university courses because some topics learnt at university were not applicable in schools. Consequently, one can argue that the university did not prepare these future teachers adequately for classrooms practice. Similar concerns were raised by Mukeredzi and Samuel (2021) who also argue that initial teacher preparation programmes do not address specifics of classroom/school realities within which teachers work. This appears to have been the case with some students.

Technology students complained about lack of preparation to teach the practical component. For example:

We had no preparation for teaching technology practical, we learnt content, lots of theory, but no workshop experience. I was frustrated at the school, I looked like a fool, embarrassed, they have a fully equipped workshop, but I did not know how or what to teach learners. (4th year Technology ST16 on the Questionnaire).

Technology practical work like sciences has been hailed for promotion of students' positive attitudes, enhancement of motivation for effective learning, improvement of understanding, development of problem-solving skills and understanding the nature of technology by replicating actions of technologists (Sshana & Abulibdeh, 2020). Experiences reported by ST16 are consistent with discoveries of Nasimiyu (2017) who laments that university education courses are narrow in scope, conservative in nature, providing only theoretical background on the teaching profession without stressing pedagogical implications. Consequently, exposure to teaching the practical component meaningfully, affects students' achievement in the subject as their critical thinking, and problem-solving skills can be improved by so doing become more motivated and interested in the subject. However, this was lacking in this study.

Others particularly those who were posted to rural schools complained that they had not been prepared for contextual challenges in such schools.

We were not warned about limited resources. X Secondary school has limited resources so I had to use my transport money to get information for learners. (3rd year ST6 on the Questionnaire)

Extant literature (see for example Kline et al., 2013; Moletsane, 2012; Mukeredzi, 2017) shows severe under-resourcing in rural schools not only in South Africa, but the world over. Rural schools globally experience social ills and hindrances to quality learning and achievements: low learner attainments; poor financing and resourcing; problems of "hard to staff, harder to stay" due to prevailing discourse of deficiency which regards rural school teaching as low-grade. These obstacles adversely impact on education quality achievement, consequently giving rise to associating rurality with deficiencies and disadvantage (Moletsane, 2012). It therefore would not be surprising that students were confronted with under-resourcing. However, Mukeredzi and Mandrona (2013) found that students preliminary visits to host schools before TP is an effective way of establishing positive, supportive relationships with host schools which expose them, to the nature of resourcing and other challenges before taking up TP in such schools.

CONCLUSIONS

Through an exploration of students from one university, the study sought to understand whether pre-service teachers are prepared adequately for TP. What emerged was that adequate preparation was in content knowledge, pedagogy, professionalism including classroom communication, and learner motivation. Findings also revealed that students were not prepared for classroom management, learner discipline, and practical lessons, and were not generatively exposed to micro or peer-teaching.

Possession of subject content is essential, not only for teaching itself but also for evaluation and selection of text books, and teaching resources. According to Cogill (2008) it is those teachers who are well grounded in content who teach in more interesting and dynamic ways whilst those with little CK shy away from difficult concepts of the subject, or adopt suspect didactic strategies in their teaching.

What also emerged was that students were well prepared for most pedagogical aspects. The combination of content knowledge and pedagogy is likely to have produced effective teaching. Teachers who have and are confident in their CK bring particular attributes to their pedagogical practice (Mukeredzi 2017). Cogill (2008) further says effective teachers often have extensive subject knowledge.

Given that motivation is a driving force behind human behaviour, the ability to motivate learners which students gained in university is likely to have fostered learner learning interest, consequently improved performance, enhanced their well-being and personal growth in their learning to maintain goal-oriented behaviour during lessons.

Professionalism which student teachers were equipped with, is an important basis for a quality teaching force which also impacts on how teachers feel about their work. Teachers are more satisfied and confident, and have a higher perception of the value of the teaching profession in society, when there is more support for peer networks.

Classroom management including learner discipline is important for student achievements because it creates an environment that minimises disruptions and maximises instruction time and learner learning engagement. Given the lack of student classroom management preparation by the university, this is likely to have affected lesson delivery as poor learner behaviour and distractions inhibit learner focused learning. Given that effective classroom management and learner discipline sustain an orderly environment in the classroom, increases learning and promotes social and emotional growth, decreases negative behaviours and enhances time spent academically, teacher educators should ensure adequate preparation of students in this pedagogical area before they go out on TP.

Peer or micro teaching which the university appears to have neglected is vital for practice elasticity as it aids development of diverse abilities, boosts development of confidence and positive attitude to achieve better results, offering students teaching experience likely to reduce error in the classroom (Jackson & Bruegmann, 2009). The lack of properly guided exposure to this process, placed students at a disadvantage. The university should include peer and microteaching in their student preparation for TP. While this was a small study which offers some significant insights, a more comprehensive study would yield more concrete results.

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